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## **Twenty years of historical pragmatics: Origins, developments and changing thought styles**

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**Abstract:** This paper provides an outline of the changes in linguistics that gave rise to historical pragmatics in the 1990s and that have shaped its development over the twenty years of its existence. These changes have affected virtually all aspects of linguistic analyses: the nature of the data, the research questions, the methods and tools that are being used for the analysis, as well as the nature of the generalizations and findings that result from these investigations. We deal with the changes in terms of shifts in thought styles and discuss seven different turns: the pragmatic turn, the socio-cultural turn, the dispersive turn, the empirical turn, the digital turn, the discursive turn and the diachronic turn. We also deal with some long-standing, recent or emerging interfaces where historical pragmatics interacts with other disciplines and we discuss some future challenges, such as the multimodality and fluidity of communication and the problem of combining big data with pragmatic micro analyses.

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## **Twenty years of historical pragmatics**

### **Origins, developments and changing thought styles**

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This article provides an outline of the changes in linguistics that gave rise to historical pragmatics in the 1990s and that have shaped its development in the twenty years of its existence. These changes have affected virtually all aspects of linguistic analyses: the nature of the data, the research questions, the methods and tools that are being used for the analysis as well as the nature of the generalizations and findings that result from these investigations. We deal with the changes in terms of shifts in thought styles and discuss seven different turns: the pragmatic turn, the socio-cultural turn, the dispersive turn, the empirical turn, the digital turn, the discursive turn and the diachronic turn. We also deal with some long-standing, recent or emerging interfaces where historical pragmatics interacts with other disciplines and we discuss some future challenges such as the multimodality and fluidity of communication and the problem of combining big data with pragmatic micro analyses.

**Keywords:** history of historical pragmatics , future of historical pragmatics, interfaces, thought styles

## **1. Introduction**

The year 1995 is often described as the beginning of the new field of historical pragmatics because in this year the volume was published that boldly put the title “Historical Pragmatics” on its cover (Jucker [ed.] 1995) and thereby gave the field a kind of focus and initial coherence. However, the volume did not appear out of a void, and it is interesting, with the distance of twenty years, to investigate the field of pragmatics at large and how it was developing at that time in general in order to understand why it was so easy in the early nineties to find researchers willing to contribute to a volume on historical pragmatics, why the field took off so vigorously immediately afterwards, what has come out of it and where it is heading now.

We believe that the beginning of historical pragmatics was – by and large – a by-product of several changes that affected linguistics in general. It had to do with the changing ways in which scholars thought about language and what was considered innovative and worth pursuing. In this article we would like to use the benefit of hindsight to analyse some of these changes that gave rise to historical pragmatics in the nineties and that continue to affect the research questions that are deemed to be relevant, the data that is being analysed and the methods of analysis. Historical pragmatics has developed very considerably over the last two decades, and this development can be seen as the result of changing thought styles. Thus both the inception and the further development of historical pragmatics are seen here as a direct result of changing thought styles that affected linguistics as a whole. It is the aim of this article to explore some of these changing thought styles and to put historical pragmatics into a larger context.

## **2. Changing thought styles in linguistics**

In a programmatic paper, Traugott (2008) described a number of paradigm changes that have affected the study of language over the last few decades, and she provided very brief sketches for each of them. We have elaborated on some of these sketches in our earlier work (Jucker 2012a; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013, Chap. 1). In this paper we depart from Traugott’s formulations and set her paradigm changes into a larger context of a number of changing thought styles. Linguistics as a field of study is very different in 2015 from what it was in 1995 or in 1975. In linguistics in general the dominating paradigm in the seventies was generative grammar whose main research tools were introspection and rational reflection. In historical linguistics at the same time, the dominating paradigm was very much focused on texts as artefacts,

detached from their contexts of users and situations. It focused on the sound systems of languages, the structures of words and sentences and their combinations, and on the meanings of individual words. Both the general linguists and the historical linguists at that time were interested in a coherent and homogeneous language system and the native speaker's competence, that is to say, his or her internalized language system. Actual language use and externalized language as seen in natural communication was of little interest. But this has all changed, and it had already changed by the early nineties.

The changing thought styles affected virtually all aspects of linguistic analyses. It affected the nature of the data that was deemed acceptable for linguistic investigations, the questions that linguists set out to answer, the methods and tools that were used for the analysis and the nature of the generalizations and findings that resulted from these investigations. In the main part of this paper, we shall deal with these changing thought styles in terms of seven different turns: the pragmatic turn, the socio-cultural turn, the dispersive turn, the empirical turn, the digital turn, the discursive turn and the diachronic turn.<sup>1</sup> Most of these turns, or shifts in thought styles, are closely connected and interrelated in many ways. We present them separately for ease of exposition and to explore their individual influences first on the inception and then on the further development of historical pragmatics. Next we shall deal with some long-standing, recent or emerging interfaces, where historical pragmatics interacts with other disciplines. In the final part of this paper, we will attempt to gaze into the crystal ball and speculate about the future development of historical pragmatics on the basis of what we see as the current changes in the relevant thought styles.

## 2.1 The pragmatic turn: from native speaker competence to performance

In Traugott's (2008: 208) terms, linguistics turned from a focus on competence alone to use as well, and it turned from analysing sentences out of context to clauses in context. We subsume this under the well-known term "pragmatic turn". In the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties, the pragmatic turn had a major impact on the entire field of linguistics. It was based on earlier work by language philosophers, in particular Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle, and Grice, who had come to see language as a means of communication and not just a complex system of signs and who started to have an influence on linguists. It involved a shift from native-speaker competence and "arm chair" linguistics

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1. As one of our reviewers points out, it would be easy to add a few other turns, such as the cognitive turn, the affective turn, the intercultural turn, or the theoretical turn. All of them are interrelated in complex ways with the turns that we focus on in this paper.

with introspective data to empirical investigations of authentic utterances. This main turn in linguistic thinking enhanced real language use as the object of study and the emphasis shifted from made-up sentences to utterances and discourse.

The dominating paradigm in linguistics in the seventies was generative grammar. It was the explicit aim of the linguist to describe an abstract language system that represented the native speaker's competence, i.e. his or her ability to produce and understand novel sentences and to make reliable judgments about the grammaticality of individual sentences. According to Chomsky, the object of a linguistic theory was the knowledge that ideal speaker-hearers have of the grammar of their language on the assumption that "knowledge of the language of [their] speech community is uniformly represented in the mind of each of its members, as one element in a system of cognitive structures" (Chomsky 1980, 220). The pragmatic turn came about both as a result of developments within mainstream linguistics and as a result of influences from the natural language philosophers. People like John Robert Ross and George Lakoff tried to integrate a theory of meaning into their theories of syntax, but eventually it became clear that too many problems had to be ignored in the endeavour to develop a comprehensive theory of syntax, or as Bar-Hillel (1971) complained, too many problems ended up in the "pragmatic wastebasket".<sup>2</sup> Eventually the linguists turned to the wastebasket itself and found that language philosophers, such as Austin, Searle and Grice had already been cultivating this area (Leech 1983, 2; Jucker 2012a, 504; Mey 2009, 793).

The pragmatic turn manifested itself also in a whole series of new textbooks on pragmatics and discourse published in the eighties (Levinson 1983; Stubbs 1983; Brown and Yule 1983; Leech 1983; Green 1989) as well as journals (the first volume of the *Journal of Pragmatics* appeared in 1979) and conferences (e.g. the conferences of the International Pragmatics Association started in the mid-1980s). In the early nineties pragmatics was already a strong and vigorous field that was starting to reach out into new territories, e.g. in the form of contrastive pragmatics (Oleksy 1989), experimental pragmatics (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) or developmental pragmatics (Ninio and Snow 1996).

However, the pragmatic turn did not affect the entire field of linguistics and it did not affect all the sub-fields of linguistics at once. Historical linguistics took longer to be affected. It differed considerably from mainstream linguistics. Its interest in language varieties of the past meant that it did not

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2. The other reviewer pointed out that the "pragmatic turn" has been somewhat less of a turn in the U.S. with its Chomskian domination.

have access to native speaker intuitions. It relied entirely on empirical evidence in the form of textual witnesses of the language of earlier periods. At the same time it was closely related to literary analysis because literary works were considered to provide particularly valuable specimens of the language of the past. And, in fact, literary approaches to historical texts turned out to provide a fertile ground for historical pragmatics. There had always been researchers who were interested in the communicative behaviour of the characters in their texts. The use of terms of address in Middle English and in Early Modern English, for instance, received the attention of many scholars over the decades throughout the last century (e.g. Stidston 1917; Nathan 1959; Finkenstaedt 1963; Mulholland 1967; Brown and Gilman 1989). Other scholars investigated the communicative interaction between the author of a historical text and the modern reader, e.g. Sell in several of his publications (1985a, 1985b, 1991). Thus, by the time that historical linguistics was affected by the pragmatic turn, there was already a substantial body of literature that had dealt with what – with hindsight – might be called pragmatic problems in the literature of earlier periods.

The pragmatic turn was the most important precondition for historical pragmatics to take off as an independent field of study. As pointed out above, there had always been sporadic interests in aspects of language use in historical texts, especially in the field of literary studies, but it was the pragmatic turn in linguistics in general which provided the basis for a more systematic extension of pragmatic research interests into the field of historical linguistics.

## 2.2 The sociocultural turn: from “langue” to “parole”

The variationist view (instead of a homogeneous language system) was first advocated in 1968 by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog in a ground-breaking article, paving the way to the new turn from “langue” to “parole”. This paradigm change took off in the 70s and 80s with William Labov’s sociolinguistic work on individual speakers’ language use. This line of assessment was extended to historical data by Suzanne Romaine in her pioneering book in 1982, where she applied sociolinguistic tenets and research findings to historical materials. In the following decade, the *Helsinki Corpus*, launched in the early 90s, provided fresh historical data for sociohistorical language studies, and was soon invigorated by other historical corpora under work, especially the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (CEEC, see CoRD).

In pragmatics, the socio-cultural turn is very much connected with the broad European view that emphasizes societal and cultural aspects, or in Mey’s words (2001, 6) “[p]ragmatics studies the use of language in human

communication as determined by the conditions of society”. When extended to past periods and historical data, historical pragmatics “wants to understand the patterns of intentional human interaction (as determined by the conditions of society) of earlier periods, the historical developments of these patterns, and the general principles underlying such developments” (Jucker 2008, 895). In addition, “language is viewed as an instrument of communication that responds to, and is shaped by its users in historical, ideological, social and situational contexts” (Taavitsainen 2010, 32). This view emphasizes background knowledge of societal conditions and expertise on the period and language-specific cultural conditions. The overlap with sociolinguistics is considerable, as historical sociolinguistics was recently defined as “the reconstruction of the history of a given language in its socio-cultural context” (Conde-Silvestre and Hernández-Campoy 2012, 1).

The essence of the broad view of pragmatics has been described by Veschuere (1999, 7, 11) as an overarching “cognitive, social and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena” that includes all levels of language use and serves as a point of convergence for the interdisciplinary fields of investigation. In contrast, the Anglo-American approach focuses on pragmatic motivations of language change, as according to Traugott’s definition (2004, 538) historical pragmatics is a “usage based approach to language change”, and sociolinguistics is regarded as a separate discipline.

The “perspective view” is wide in scope, but not all levels have received equal attention. Even more microlevel linguistic features can be relevant for communicating pragmatic meanings. Punctuation studies provide a case in point of how the wider cultural angle is applied to linguistic practices. Studies on the use of commas, colons, semicolons and full stops (and their predecessors) focus on minute details of text production. Traditional studies paid attention to how often and in what position these marks were found, but their functions have come to the forefront now (see also 3 below). The goal of recent studies has been to interpret what additional meanings were communicated with the various marks (Williams 2013), and even the reverse side has been discussed, as it has been noted that the absence of such features can be as significant as their presence (Smith and Kay 2011, 212). Extending this line further, silence and pauses can also be studied from the pragmatic angle.

It has been stated that “context is everything” in pragmatics (Wharton 2010, 75), but context is a complex and multilayered notion. Past periods and historical data create their own problems and require special attention, and there have been changes in research practices. Context plays a decisive role in utterance interpretation, but it is understood in a new way as a dynamic and multilayered notion. Researchers rely on real language use for their data, and

contextual information about texts and their text worlds are important. It is useful to distinguish two levels here: the text as communication between speakers and hearers, writers and readers, past and present (see Jucker and Pahta 2011), and the embedded text world with real or fictional characters (as depicted in the text). The second level has its own interpersonal relations between its characters that undergo changes. Most clearly this happens in drama and fiction, where the speaking situations contain momentary shifts in interaction. Thus it is not only the linguistic co-text and prior discourse that need to be taken into account, but the social parameters of those involved, their age, gender, and social status as well as the prevailing societal norms of upbringing and conduct need to be considered. In addition to making use of the above listed sociolinguistic aspects, the need to develop new tools for the pragmatic assessment of variability and negotiability of language use has been noted, and such pragmatic parameters could be added to the analysts' toolkit (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2012). They would take the contexts created by prior discourse into account and thus account for more dynamic aspects of language use than sociolinguistic parameters. The socio-cultural nature of the communicative event belongs to the next level in the widening scope of context. Language use in communication is always a situated activity within genres and discourse domains; religious discourse, scientific discourse, media discourse, courtroom discourse and personal correspondence serve as examples. Genres are cultural practices, created for the needs of their users, developed for various communicative tasks and they change in time. Shared common ground and mutual knowledge are important, and in historical studies they become even more important, as we cannot take modern assumptions for granted (see Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007). There are differences in all aspects, e.g. the cultural map of past periods consisted of local practices that were very different before our present phase of globalization.

The socio-cultural turn seems to have proceeded in two phases. The requirement of the socio-cultural context of communication has been present in historical pragmatics from the beginning, but in addition to the attributes of social class, education and standing, the situation where the text and discourse were produced, the medium it was produced in, and how it was delivered to the recipient all need consideration. The broadening of the wider cultural context to extend to the world view, attitudes and outlooks that govern fundamental aspects of human culture is, however, more recent. Such socio-cultural aspects have received increasing attention lately, and for example the changing thought styles of scientific thinking are very much connected with changing cultural premises (Taavitsainen 2000, 2002, 2009). For a full picture, the context encompasses the world view of the period when the text was produced, people's shared views of the universe and the position of man in it. A great



deal of background knowledge of the period is needed to achieve a more holistic picture out of scattered pieces for more profound cultural insights. With these demands, we are approaching the former requirements of philological studies, but in a renewed form with a broad empirical basis created by new electronic databases (see section 2.5) with the help of modern technology. With the new digital turn (see below) we have entered a completely new phase of scholarship.

### 2.3 The dispersive turn: From core to periphery

What we call the “dispersive turn” covers several closely related developments that diversified linguistics on several levels and that started largely in the 1970s. Linguistics began to reach out and focus on elements that used to be marginal. It started to be more interested in the heterogeneity of language and rejected the idea of a homogeneous language as an unwarranted simplification. And it moved from the description of sounds, words and sentences to larger elements, such as texts, discourse and entire corpora. Discourse markers are a good example of elements that back in the seventies of the last century were mostly considered as irrelevant and unworthy of linguistic analyses. This changed in the eighties with the groundbreaking work by Schiffrin (e.g. 1987) and others. All of a sudden discourse markers were no longer seen as mere irrelevancies of actual performance but they were recognized to be used in ways that are highly regular and worthy of linguistic analyses. More than a decade earlier Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) had published their landmark paper, in which they proposed an analytical framework for a detailed analysis of the minutiae of the turn-taking system in actual face-to-face interactions, focusing on the pauses, interruptions, and brief overlaps that are typical of spontaneous conversations. Thus, what had seemed marginal and irrelevant to earlier generations of linguists became central aspects of linguistic description. In recent years linguistic interest has shifted to even more marginal elements, such as hesitation phenomena like *er* and *erm*, which are variously called hesitation markers or planners (Clark and Fox Tree 2002; Erard 2007; Kjellmer 2008; Schegloff 2010; Tottie 2011).

With some delay these interests in more and more marginal elements were extended to the historical contexts. Brinton (1996) was an early monograph on historical pragmatics, and it was devoted to pragmatic markers, or rather pragmatic particles as Brinton calls these elements. She investigated a whole range of markers in the history of English, e.g. the Old English *hwæt*, Middle English *gan* and *I gesse*, and Middle/Early Modern English *anon*, their discourse functions and the processes of grammaticalization that can be observed in their diachronic developments. As in linguistics in general, in

historical pragmatics the interest soon shifted to more microlevel elements. Culpeper and Kytö coined the term “pragmatic noise”, which according to their definition (2010, 199) encompasses elements that to some extent at least are sound symbolic and which do not have homonyms or related words in other word classes (interjections are excluded, for instance). These items appear mostly parenthetically and do not take part in traditional sentence constructions, and they have pragmatic meaning but no propositional or referential meaning. Their study focuses mainly on elements whose spellings start with <a> or <ha>, e.g. *ah*, *ay*, *alas*, *aha* or *ha*, and elements whose spellings start with <o> or <ho>, e.g. *o*, *oh*, *oho* or *ho*, and investigate their discourse functions and distributions in their corpus of Early Modern English dialogues. Even the investigation of the hesitators or planners *uh* and *um* has recently been applied to historical data by Jucker (forthc.), who investigates them in the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA) covering two centuries from 1810 to today. He argues that their use in the written data of the COHA differs considerably from uses reported in everyday spoken language. While in spoken language they serve all sorts of planning purposes that regularly go more or less unnoticed by the interlocutors, in written language they are used rarely and when they are used they are used as salient devices to characterize fictional characters.

The dispersive turn describes the shift of attention from core phenomena in linguistics to what initially may have appeared to be more and more marginal phenomena. In historical pragmatics, this turn was perhaps less pronounced than in linguistics in general because historical pragmaticists have always had an interest in rather peripheral elements, such as discourse markers, but the work on pragmatic noise and planners reviewed above is an indication that the dispersive turn is still on-going and researchers keep reaching out to more marginal and hitherto neglected elements. Recently they have also started to consider non-verbal elements of interaction, as, for instance, Hübler (2007), who uses courtesy books and personal documents to study gestures and other non-verbal components of conversations in the courtly society of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

#### 2.4 The empirical turn: From introspection to empirical investigations

The “Empirical turn” implies first of all the change from introspection to empirical investigation, a passage that can be followed from Chomsky’s native speaker intuitions via Quirk et al. (1985) with examples of real language use, to Biber et al. (1999) and others who employ corpus-linguistic methodologies to large electronic corpora of authentic data. In addition, this turn also includes a change from the heuristics in philological and literary studies to empirical

investigations with discourse analytical and ethnographical methods. In a few decades, corpus linguistics has become the main methodology, and our knowledge of the features and developments of linguistic patterns in various genres and types of data has grown considerably.

The data problem was of paramount importance for the early work in historical pragmatics, especially as Labov had just launched his famous slogan of historical linguists “making the best use of bad data” (1994: 11), thus referring to the analysis of written documents of the past with their haphazard survival rates, fragmentary nature and individual histories. The relation of spoken and written lies at the heart of historical linguistics, as mapping the pathways of language change is a primary motivation for historical linguistic studies (Lass 1997), and one of the generally agreed tenets is that language changes are initiated in spoken discourse and come to written language later. In the 80s, researchers felt a great need to reason about the use of written language data and justify their conclusions. Rissanen (1986, 98) argued that features that are frequently encountered in written texts that are based on spoken language, probably occurred even more frequently in the spoken language of that time. Such data was considered better suited than texts that were exclusively written and most researchers relied on written texts as approximations to what they were really interested in, i.e. the spoken language of earlier periods.

The main differences in the attitudes to data sources two decades ago and now deal with the question whether written data is understood as an imperfect approximation of “the real thing” or whether it is considered to be sufficiently interesting in itself. The former was the general trend among historical linguists, but there were exceptions even in the early days of historical pragmatics as researchers with different research aims were interested in the pragmatics of written texts in their own right, e.g. in historical genre studies. The latter view was advocated from the beginning, as “[w]ritten texts can be understood as communicative manifestations in their own right, and as such they are amenable to pragmatic analysis” (Jacobs and Jucker 1995: 9, 26). At present this is the prevailing view and written texts are accepted as perfectly legitimate data in their own right, with their own merits and restrictions. The formulations of this view have become more explicit and more refined, and e.g. drama and dialogue are seen as genres among other written genres with their own features, such as typified speech acts or salient non-standard or dialectal speech to mark their fictional characters. The interface between language and literature has been particularly interested in finding out such special features (see section 3).

Looking with hindsight, a basis for the new phase in data questions can be found in the changing thought styles of the mid-nineties. Pragmatics had

learnt to look for communicative behaviour beyond the limits of the spoken word, and historical linguists were learning to ask questions beyond the immediate sentence and text boundaries of historical texts. The relation of spoken and written language is still important and has inspired researchers to launch new models and refine them. The Koch and Oesterreicher (1985) model describes the relations of various types of data to one another, and Biber and Finegan (1992) used a broad range of linguistic features and statistical corpus linguistic measurements to locate various genres in a larger map and assess their development in time.

## 2.5 The digital turn: From qualitative to quantitative research

The digital turn in linguistics is directly based on the development of computer technology and the more widespread availability of such technology. In the 60s and 70s of the last century, some linguists already had access to big mainframe computers, and indeed the first electronic corpora used by linguists (the *Brown Corpus* and the *Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen Corpus*) were compiled at this time. But computing time was expensive and very few linguists had access. It was also a time when corpus-based linguistics met with a lot of skepticism if not hostility from the majority of linguists. In the 80s personal computers became widely available. Computing power and computer memory became increasingly affordable, and today it is probably fair to say that the majority of linguists regularly rely at least to some extent on computer-readable corpora for their work.

The early corpora were small in size, at least from today's perspective, and they attempted to be representative of a chosen variety, such as American English or British English, in general. This is closely connected to the prevailing view of a language as a homogeneous entity. The first historical corpus, the *Helsinki Corpus*, was launched in 1991 and with it historical linguistics entered a new phase. The underlying thought style still conformed to the view of language as a homogeneous entity in its explicit attempt to provide a representative sample of the entire repertoire of genres and text types for each period that it covered. The insight of variability even within narrowly defined groups of texts came later with empirical studies (e.g. Meurman-Solin 1993; Taavitsainen 1993). The *Helsinki Corpus* soon became an indispensable tool in historical linguistics, which allowed a whole range of new questions to be asked and answered. The enthusiasm with which the *Helsinki Corpus* was received and the immediate impact it had on the inception and early development of historical pragmatics can be seen in the inaugural volume of historical pragmatics, in which a considerable number of articles were already

based on the *Helsinki Corpus*. Schwenter and Traugott recognized the impact of the digital turn on historical pragmatics very clearly.

The study of English has been revolutionized by such on-line data bases as the *Diachronic Part of the Helsinki Corpus of the English Language* (...), the *Toronto Corpus of Old English* (...), and the on-line *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). Without these, the study of historical pragmatics in English from a discourse analysis perspective would still be in its infancy. (Schwenter and Traugott 1995, 245)

The early corpora became known as the first generation corpora. They were soon complemented by a series of second-generation corpora that were started in the nineties and devoted to one genre or one domain of discourse, as for instance the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, *Middle English Medical Texts* and *Early Modern English Medical Texts* (see CoRD). But these are all very small corpora compared to recent mega corpora; the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA), for instance, contains 400 million words and covers two centuries from 1810 until 2009.

All these corpora have provided historical linguistics in general and historical pragmaticists in particular with new opportunities and new challenges. Large corpora of literary and biblical texts of the Chadwyck-Healey database (1996–2011), for instance, have been used for historical pragmatic research tasks, but they present problems as they allow lexical searches only, and it is impossible to retrieve relative frequencies or to apply more advanced statistical methods to the results without a great deal of copy-pasting to an ad hoc corpus of one's own. The newest version of the 34-million- word *Late Modern English Corpus* (CLMET3.0, released in 2013) provides a remedy to this as it includes search parameters to help researchers find appropriate data for their study questions (see Diller, de Smet and Tyrkkö 2010). The Internet resources of *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) and *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO) make entire texts from a range of historical periods available to scholars. These new data resources have brought historical pragmatics to a new phase and pose new challenges to researchers. The increasing impact of corpus linguistic methodology is felt in all linguistics, including historical pragmatics. The repertoire of corpus-linguistic studies is fairly broad from corpus-based but mainly qualitative studies to applications of advanced statistical methods and computer programs specially designed for the research question under investigation. Core features of pragmatic studies, such as negotiation of meanings, speech functions, and variability of language use with momentary shifts in interpersonal relations, are harder to catch with corpus methodology than lexical or morpho-syntactic features, and therefore corpus linguistics came into pragmatics later (Romero-

Trillo 2008; Brinton 2012; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2014; Rühlemann and Aijmer forthc.).

The digital turn changed the perspective of all linguists from small to large. Corpus sizes increase at an astonishing rate and we have several ongoing or newly completed digitizing projects of historical materials covering a broad range of different types from those mentioned above to HTE (*Historical Thesaurus of English*). With the launch of Google Books NGram Viewer a new dimension of corpus size has been reached. This tool gives direct access to the relative frequency of strings of up to five words (ngrams) in a corpus that at the time of its launch comprised roughly four per cent of all the books ever published in 500 years of book publishing, which amounts to about five million books and 361 billion words (Michel et al, 2010; but see also Aiden and Michel 2013 for a more recent update). For corpus linguists this is an unusual tool, not only because of its enormous dimensions. Essentially it is not a corpus but an index of all the existing ngrams in the five million books with links to the relevant metadata. As such it affords precise frequency statements for any given year but it does not give access to the larger context in which individual ngrams were used. For the historical pragmaticists they provide a fascinating exploratory tool for a first, large-scale overview of the distribution of specific ngrams. Jucker, Taavitsainen and Schneider (2012), for instance, used it to trace the frequency of politeness related vocabulary in Late Middle and Early Modern English.

As a consequence of the digital turn an analysis solely based on manual searches and on the actual reading of the text is no longer sufficient, but is routinely supplemented by computer-assisted large-scale searches. Strictly qualitative studies are becoming rarer. More weight is placed on the quantification of results and – ultimately – on an adequate balance between qualitative findings and their quantification. The availability of historical corpora and other electronic resources together with the increasing sophistication of corpus-linguistic tools has opened up a whole range of new research paradigms, and it has become possible for historical pragmaticists to probe into research questions that could not have been answered before.

## 2.6 The discursive turn: From stable categories to discursively-negotiated meanings

Besides variability, another core issue in pragmatics is negotiability, and it has also become enhanced in recent years. The shift can be characterized as the “discursive turn”. A parallel to the change has been noted in how grammatical categories were understood earlier and how they are seen now (Traugott 2008). Instead of discrete, fixed categories, the notion of gradience has gained ground

and hybrid categories are also recognized (see Denison 2001; Aarts 2007; Traugott and Trousdale 2010). To take a related example from historical pragmatics, the difficulty of categorizing discourse markers and interjections is considerable, as they form a sliding scale, and the same items can be used in different ways, as expressions of emotion or signals of recognition or other cognitive processes. Their functions and positions in discourse, i.e. their discursive use, may be the best guide in this respect.

Researchers of written texts have learned from micro studies of spoken language and conversation analytical methodology that context changes with every new turn when communication proceeds in time. This insight has introduced a new way of looking at text as unfolding discourse, taking the influence of the preceding utterances into account. At present this view has been broadened to apply to the written mode so that the previous communicative units correspond to speaker turns and have the potential to alter the meaning of what follows (see 2.2 above). Extreme examples can be found in speech acts where irony and sarcasm can reverse the default meanings. Gratitude expressions with “thank you”, for instance, can become a personal expression of hurt feelings. Such shades are impossible to catch without context and only close reading can reveal the meanings.

As a result of this innovation the focus of attention has shifted from stable to dynamic features and from fixed categories and inherent word meanings to discursive forms and negotiated meanings, and it has shifted the focus of analysis from text and the text producer to the interaction between communication partners. This shift can most clearly be noticed in studies of politeness. The notions “polite” and “impolite” are conceived in very different terms from the early phases of historical pragmatics. Twenty years ago, politeness studies were based on Brown and Levinson (1987), who correlated politeness with specific linguistic forms with fixed and predictable default values that – by and large – remained the same, regardless of the context. In more recent studies politeness theory has moved away from Brown and Levinson’s approach and choices made by their model speaker. Discursive approaches to politeness are concerned with contextual analysis and the point to consider is what the used phrases and words mean to the participants in interaction, whether they understand the utterances as polite, impolite or appropriate, and how they come to make those decisions (Mills 2011, 3). Actual uses can deviate from the default value, e.g. a “polite” form of address can be used sarcastically, and the sarcasm relies on the default value for its effect. Negotiability is enhanced, and it is stated that politeness values cannot be predicted but have to be analysed in context. Between the extremes, a new notion of “appropriateness” has been added, to situate politeness in its wider context of culture (see Watts 2003; Locher and Watts 2005; Schneider 2012).

In the early days of historical pragmatics, Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness study provided the basis for new insights into historical materials. Brown and Gilman (1989) and Kopytko (1995), for instance, studied positive and negative politeness strategies in Shakespeare's plays, and Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995) studied nominal terms of address, which they placed on various scales of intimacy and politeness ranging from intimate terms of endearment to more distant terms of deference. In more recent years, historical analyses have turned to more discursive approaches without such fixed and predetermined values. Jucker (2012b), for instance, applies a discursive politeness approach to Ben Jonson's comedy *Volpone*, which is a play full of deception and intrigue. The deceiving characters choose what appear to be exceedingly polite formulations for their interactions to carry out their stratagems and thus reverse their politeness values while the honest characters in their interactions with the deceiving characters use seemingly impolite formulations that are direct and honest. Such subtleties would be lost in an analysis that focuses merely on the default politeness values of certain expressions.

## 2.7 The diachronic turn: from atemporal to time-related and historical

Traditional philological studies combined the study of language, literature and culture. In historical pragmatics, expertise of the older language forms is a prerequisite for reliable analysis, and cultural aspects of past periods are needed to contextualize the results. An atemporal viewpoint with focus on more "abstract" principles of language systems was the prevailing mode in linguistics in the latter half of the twentieth century. With it the language history requirement was abandoned at many universities in the late 60s and 70s. But the attitudes to historical studies have been changing. Traugott (2008, 208) describes one of the recent turns "from strictly synchronic to dynamic and diachronic", and associates the diachronic turn with the possibility to describe ongoing language change as a dynamic process at work, as Labov had done. We have dealt with dynamic aspects of language use and new ways of understanding meaning-making processes in discourse in section 2.6, and we see the diachronic turn in a somewhat different light, mainly as a change of attitudes to language history and changing practices in linguistic research. For example, in the ICAME (International Computer Archive of Modern and Medieval English) Conferences in the late 80s and early 90s, historical topics were dealt with in separate preconference workshops. In the meantime, the word "medieval" has been added to the title, and historical papers are now regularly integrated into the main conference among synchronic studies.



Furthermore, it has become common in conference presentations to overview the history of the investigated feature and research articles with synchronic assessments often refer to historical aspects for a better understanding of the issues. An increasing awareness of the diachronic developments is also manifested in a forthcoming book (Taavitsainen et al. [eds.] forthc. 2014) where articles on Present-day varieties begin by overviews of the history of the particular variety.

### **3. Interfaces with new developments:<sup>3</sup> historical pragmatics as a point of convergence**

According to the perspective view, pragmatics can serve as a point of convergence for new interdisciplinary fields of study. This is indeed what has happened and what is happening to historical pragmatics. In this section we shall outline some recent developments, and also project into the future. We shall begin with the interface between language and literature, discuss the interface between history and linguistics and history of science and linguistics, and then move on to philological studies and multimodality.

The work done at the interface between language and literature provided an important incentive for the launch of historical pragmatics (see 2.1). Besides those mentioned above, several literary scholars have contributed to the further development of the field (e.g. Fludernik 1993, 1996; Toolan 1996, 2001), and some historical pragmaticists also contribute to literary studies (e.g. Culpeper 2001). Current studies on genre deal with macrostructures of communication with genre dynamics in focus. This trend was initiated by literary scholars like Alistair Fowler (1982) and Tzvetan Todorov (1990). At present historical pragmaticists are researching several discourse domains like religion, law and science paying attention to the changing patterns of language use and formation of conventions in a long diachronic perspective (Taavitsainen forthc.). The influence of literary studies continues, and linguistic stylistics and corpus stylistics should be mentioned as particularly relevant and fruitful sources of inspiration for historical pragmatic studies. Several articles in the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* give evidence of the versatility of this influence.

Studies in “pragmaphilology” can be described as “going back to the roots” as they emphasize cultural aspects and detailed assessments of past texts often with literary merits. In the 90s such studies were mainly qualitative, but

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3. This section could also be called the interdisciplinary turn. We would like to enhance the trend towards interdisciplinary research, as it seems to be the future way to go.

this has changed. At present we encounter philological studies in a completely renewed form with pragmatic research questions and methodologies strongly connected with digital humanities and modern technology (see 2.5), and the emphasis has shifted towards non-literary writing of “Fachprosa” in recent decades (see Marttila *forthc.* 2014). Another manifestation of the new trends can be seen in the recent interface between historical pragmatics and book history where meaning-making functions are enhanced. Attention is paid to how physical features on the page contribute to interpersonal communication in the written media (see Meurman-Solin and Tyrkkö [eds.] 2013; Kytö and Peikola 2014).

Traditional philological studies dealt with older stages of language and literature, with a strong focus on the editing of manuscripts. Pictorial presentations have become important with digital imaging and editorial activity is also moving to the digital world. In an ideal case manuscript pages are presented in digital images with modern transcriptions in several versions of text with more or less editorial intervention. With these improvements, the multimodal mode is becoming main stream in textual scholarship. A similar step forward is emerging in the corpus world, as e.g. researchers using *Early Modern English Medical Texts* have access to the title pages in the corpus itself and facsimiles of the original book through links to EEBO (subject to subscription). Multimodality is a newcomer in historical pragmatics, and besides the pragmaphilological openings, it can make a contribution to the presentation of research results in the new digital publication channels (see the volume *Developing Corpus Methodology for Historical Pragmatics* edited by Suhr and Taavitsainen 2012).

#### **4. The future**

We have considered the shifts in linguistic thought styles from the pragmatic angle and discussed them through historical pragmatic studies, highlighting the differences that initially prepared the ground for its inception and that shaped the twenty years of its history. Needless to say that this presentation had to simplify some of the developments, which in reality were perhaps less linear and less clear-cut. It is not easy to predict the future, but against the background of these changes in thought styles we can highlight what we feel to be the most important and the most promising developments that are taking place at the moment and that are likely to shape the future of historical pragmatics.

First, we expect the discursive turn to continue to have a noticeable impact on the development of historical pragmatics. Linguistic categories are

increasingly seen as dynamic and fuzzy rather than fixed and stable, and they are subject to the discursive struggles between the interactants. We have illustrated this change in thought style with the example of politeness research, which has moved away from identifying specific politeness values of individual linguistic forms or expressions to analysing negotiation of shades of meaning in exchanges between the interactional partners. Concomitantly we see an on-going shift of focus away from the text itself to the interaction between conversational partners. In speech act theory, for instance, this means that we will move away from the traditional perspective on the illocutionary form of specific utterances. In the past, speech act studies tended to focus on the intentions and the sincerity of the speaker when he or she produces an utterance that we call a promise, a compliment or a directive. In the future speech act analyses will more consistently focus on the interaction between the participants and how speech act values are jointly negotiated and established in the interaction, e.g. how an utterance by one participant may be a compliment or become an insult because the other participant takes it as such.

Second, we also expect that today's increasing multimodality and fluidity of communication will have an increasing impact on the work of all linguists including historical pragmaticists. Today, people communicate through a multitude of modalities, not just face-to-face and written, but in various computer-mediated ways, and with increasing slippages between modalities (audio, video, still-pictures, graphic text). People may listen to a lecture in a face-to-face situation, and at the same time they send WhatsApp messages to their friends, post messages on Twitter (perhaps even about the lecture they are attending), and so on. Linguists have to come to terms with these slippages between different modalities, and at the same time they increase our awareness of the complexities of textual witnesses of the past. Texts are no longer seen as fixed entities. They are fluid and multi-layered, and for example their reception histories open up new interesting angles for historical pragmaticists to explore. Traditionally editors of historical texts tried to establish one authoritative reading for a specific text; the best known examples are the student editions of Chaucer or Shakespeare, in spite of the fact that these texts originally existed in many different versions. More recent editorial projects try to combine different versions of the same text together with the facsimile and the materiality of the originals. The layout and materiality of the text is seen as a relevant part of the text with a bearing on its interpretation. Such complex editions pose new challenges to the scholars analysing these texts.

Third, we expect the trend to Big Data to have a considerable impact on historical pragmatics. Twenty years ago, the *Helsinki Corpus* with 1.5 million words was state-of-the-art in historical linguistics. Five years ago, the *Corpus*

of *Historical American English* (COHA) set a new dimension with 400 million words. At the same time the Ngram Viewer already reaches out to 361 billion words of historical texts. This unprecedented increase of data size accentuates the problem of the right balance between the amount of data and the contextualization of the data. Often the researcher has to opt for one and sacrifice the other. The Ngram Viewer presents a radical solution. For copyright reasons it is carefully constructed to actively prevent recontextualization. It consists of vast lists of ngrams linked to metadata but without any context. This allows for detailed and fascinating information on the frequency of even extremely rare ngrams in the history of English, but it does not allow for a contextualization of the ngrams. In the future it is hoped that better ways of combining the two will be found.

It has become clear above that some of the changes in thought styles are intimately linked. The empirical turn is closely connected to the digital turn, for instance, and none of the turns would have been possible without the pragmatic turn. But not all these turns point in the same direction. We can also see a diversification of approaches reaching out to new horizons, and some of the turns are not easily compatible. Thus, it is clear that the trend to Big Data will give a strong preference to quantitative studies while the discursive turn and the recognition of the multi-modal and multi-layered nature of historical data gives preference to careful, small-scale qualitative studies that are difficult to imagine in a Big Data context. It remains to be seen whether a convergence between these trends may be possible in the future or whether they will lead to an increasing diversification.

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